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City Document. — No. 120.

CITY OF BOSTON.



MESSAGE OF THE MAYOR,

STATING

REASONS FOR WITHHOLDING HIS APPROVAL OF THE ORDERS

FOR A

NEW LUNATIC HOSPITAL

AT

WINTHROP.

1867.

MAY 4 1962

CITY OF BOSTON.

Mayor's Office, Ci'y Hall.

BOSTON, Dec. 16, 1867.

To the Board of Aldermen :

The following orders have been passed by the City Council, and in regular course came to me for my official revision, viz:

“ ORDERED, That the plans and estimates for a new hospital for the insane, prepared by Nathaniel J. Bradlee, and submitted to the City Council by the Board of Directors for Public Institutions, in a communication dated Oct. 4, 1867, be, and the same are hereby approved.”

“ ORDERED, That the erection of such hospital shall be under the direction of three commissioners, to be appointed by his Honor the Mayor, with the approval of the City Council.”

These orders, although apparently providing only for a current course of business, in fact inaugurate an extensive and costly enterprise, and necessarily raise the following questions: 1st. Ought a new Hospital for the insane to be erected by the City of Boston ?

2d. If a hospital ought to be erected, should it be on the extended plan projected ?

3d. Is the present time appropriate to the commencement of such an undertaking ?

4th. Is the site which has been designated a proper one for the hospital ?

These questions I have endeavored to consider very carefully, and it seems to me to be my clear duty to communicate the

results of my investigations to the City Council for their consideration, and this I shall do with as much brevity as the nature of the case will admit.

1st. Ought a new hospital for the insane to be erected by the city of Boston?

The law requires, and it is conceded to be the duty of the City Council to provide that reasonable and proper accommodation shall be made by the city for the care and treatment of all the insane paupers who have a legal settlement in the city. Beyond making this provision, we are not obliged to go, and cannot be justified in going at a large public cost.

The Hospital now in use at South Boston was erected and opened for the reception of patients in 1839, and it was enlarged by the addition of two wings, and otherwise altered in 1846. It was designed and supposed to be, when thus improved, of capacity sufficient for the accommodation of two hundred patients, and at one time two hundred and seventy were provided for within its walls. In a communication made by the chairman of the Board of Trustees in 1854 (City Doc. No. 69, 1854), this statement is made: "The largest number which was intended to occupy the hospital, at the time of its enlargement, was two hundred." And representation was made that there were then two hundred and fifty-one inmates, but they were much crowded. In a communication from the President of the Board of Directors in 1866 (City Doc. No. 29, 1866), it is said "the hospital is now filled to its utmost proper capacity" the number of patients then being one hundred and eighty-five. It thus appears that this number can be reasonably provided for in the present hospital. By the report of the Board of Directors, made on the 30th of April of the current year, it is stated that the number of patients then in the hospital was one hundred and seventy-two. On the 10th of December current, the number was one hundred and seventy-six, of whom one hundred and forty-five were paupers, and thirty-one boarders paying compensation.

By the annexation of Roxbury we shall receive ten paupers who are insane, making the whole number of this class of paupers, for whose support the city must provide, one hundred and fifty-five, and leaving room in the building for the accommodation of thirty additional patients. It is thus shown that the hospital is not now crowded; and if at a future time, the number of patients shall exceed the capacity of the building, it will then be in season to consider whether a new building shall be erected, or the existing one enlarged by the addition of another wing. The reason that the number of patients in the hospital now is less than it was formerly, is found in the fact that prior to 1858 the city provided for the insane paupers found here, who had no settlement in the State, and were paid therefor from the treasury of the State. When the State provided hospitals for the insane, those in our hospital, for whose support the State had paid, were removed to the State Hospitals.

It is said, and I have no doubt truly, that at the time when the hospital was built, the science of the treatment of the insane was in its infancy, and the proper construction of hospitals but imperfectly understood, and that therefore the present edifice is destitute of some of the conveniences which are found in hospitals more recently erected. It is also said that the land now appropriated to the institution is too small in quantity, and this is undoubtedly correct. It is however probable that the more important improvements which the progress of science has developed in the structure of hospitals, may be introduced into the present building and at expense very trifling in comparison with the cost of the proposed new edifice. It is not supposed that the present building can be made as good as the one that it is now proposed to build, but it is believed that it can be put in such condition as to ensure all the necessary purposes of the institution.

The land connected with the hospital consists of about four and a half acres. The city owns about three hundred thousand

square feet of land directly in front of the hospital, on the opposite side of First Street, all of which if needed may be appropriated to the institution.

2d. If the hospital ought to be erected, should it be on the extended plan now projected?

The main building, on the plan which the orders under consideration adopt, is three stories high, exclusive of the basement and French roof, and has a frontage on an irregular line of nine hundred and one feet, measuring on a straight line, and of one thousand and ninety-one feet, measuring on the face of the building, and if erected on School and Beacon Streets, would extend from Washington Street to within one rod of Somerset Street, or from Washington Street to the Athenæum, if placed upon a straight line. The estimated cost of this building, not including furniture, is four hundred and ninety-eight thousand five hundred and three dollars. Although I have the fullest confidence in the fairness and ability of the very competent architect who made the plans and estimates, experience teaches us that the actual cost must be expected to largely exceed the estimates. When the building is completed and the necessary furniture placed in it, and all the required outbuildings, such as farm-houses, barns, coal-house, wharf, fences, roads, paths, tools and implements for farming, stock, etc., are provided, is it not probable that the aggregate will reach the sum of eight hundred thousand dollars? In my judgment it ought not to be assumed that a less sum will suffice. It is supposed that this large outlay is to provide for the accommodation of three hundred patients. We have but little more than one half of this number for whom it is our duty to make provision. Can we expect, in competition with the many other well-managed institutions for the treatment of the insane, to fill the vacant rooms at prices which will compensate the city for any considerable proportion of its large outlay?

When the hospital is built, the city will be obliged to pro-

vide supplies, attendants and laborers commensurate with the magnitude and character of the institution.

The policy of a municipality undertaking the conduct of any business outside of its corporate duties, and in which it must come in competition with private enterprise, is of more than doubtful expediency; but to engage in one of the kind now under consideration, where heavy expenditure is certain, and its benefits are uncertain, is unwise administration, and unjust to our constituents. I recommend most earnestly that the action of the City Council be limited to making provisions for the insane only so far as that duty is devolved upon us by law.

3. Is the present time appropriate to the commencement of such an undertaking?

The prices of labor and building materials are now so high, that it is, I suppose, a moderate estimate to place the cost of the whole undertaking at fifty per cent beyond what it would have been a few years since, or we reasonably hope it will be a few years hence. And now the taxes necessarily imposed upon the citizens for national, State and municipal purposes, are so heavy as to generally be felt as a burden, and the uncertainty of returns from the various pursuits of industry in the immediate future justly causes great solicitude in regard to this subject. It therefore seems to me that it would require a much greater exigency than now exists, to justify us in adding so largely to the debt of the city at this time and for this purpose.

4. Is the site which has been designated a proper one for the hospital?

Several parcels of land and marsh, in all about one hundred and eighty acres, situated in the town of Winthrop, have been purchased as a site and grounds for the proposed hospital. These lands are about five miles distant from the city, and not easily accessible. They are near the headlands in that town, and are so exposed to the wind and gales that it has been found impracticable to cultivate trees upon them. Trees and shrub-

bery are considered by those most conversant with the treatment of the insane to be an indispensable surrounding of a lunatic hospital. Doct. Ray of Providence, who, the Board of Directors in one of their reports to the City Council justly say, "ranks among the first of American superintendents" after visiting most of the principal hospitals for the insane in Great Britain, France, and Germany, published an article which was considered by the Board of Directors of so much value as to induce them to incorporate a large part of it in their memorial. (City Doc., No. 11, 1863.) In that article Doct. Ray dilates largely upon the importance of trees, shrubbery, flowers, etc. in connection with such hospitals. He says, it is to be hoped "that we never shall be contented in any case with a bald and monotonous surface, where no tree, no shrub, no fountain, nor rural arbor, no lake, no mound, is allowed to add a single feature of beauty to the scene," and much more of a similar import.

At the request of the Board of Directors, the Suffolk District Medical Society appointed a committee consisting of seven members of their own body to examine and report upon the plan and site for the proposed hospital. A majority of that committee in a communication addressed to me say, "that in their opinion, strong objections exist to the proposed site, its exposed situation depriving its inmates of the advantages of outdoor exercise during much of the year, and rendering a growth of trees and shrubbery, so important to the comfort and recreation of insane patients, nearly impossible.

General Foster, who is superintending the erection of sea walls for the protection of headlands in our harbor, under the authority of the Federal Government, writes in a communication addressed to me, that the bluff is gradually being worn away by the winds and waves, that the position is one of great exposure, fully as great as that of the most prominent headlands of the outer harbor, and it will become necessary in case

the City of Boston erect hospital buildings upon it, to protect it by the erection of a sea wall before many years, and he estimates the cost of the sea wall at one hundred thousand dollars.

Provision for water in this locality must be attended with difficulties and large expense.

The valuation of property in the town of Winthrop in 1865, was four hundred and six thousand two hundred and thirty-nine dollars. If the hospital should be erected as proposed, the valuation of the city's property in Winthrop, would probably be about twice that amount, so that of all moneys raised by the town by taxation, this city will be obliged to pay about two-thirds, without any vote as to the amount to be, raised or the purposes to which the money shall be applied.

These considerations, I respectfully submit, should be conclusive upon the question of erecting a hospital in Winthrop; when that place was selected for this purpose, it was supposed that no suitable site could be procured within the city. The annexation of Roxbury has changed the circumstances of the case and brought within our reach and municipal boundaries, land much better adapted to our wants. It is certainly much to be desired that if the large expenditure is to be made, the building should be located so as to be an ornament to our city and where it will not be taxed for the benefit of another municipality.

Entertaining these views a sense of duty compels me to return the orders to the Board in which they originated, without my official approval.

OTIS NORCROSS,

Mayor.

